

9th Sunday of Pentecost
July 25, 2010
Fr. Bill McGinty

“The price of freedom is death!”

Today’s readings are all about freedom, but different kinds of freedom; Gomer thinks she is free to do what she wants, but really she is conditioned by her situation. The Colossians feel their freedom is threatened and in the Gospel Jesus tells his disciples that true freedom lies in knowing the truth, the truth about his father.

So here is a story about freedom.

There was once a king who had two daughters. They were equally pretty and intelligent. Yet, one was virtuous wise and kind, while the other was self-centered, cruel and devious. Both women wanted to inherit their father’s kingdom, but for different reasons. The cruel sister wanted wealth and power; while the wise sister wanted to serve her father’ people faithfully all her days.

One day the king called both his daughters to his table. “Which of you will rule my kingdom after I have gone?” he said. Both women raised their hand. “Well,” said the king, “you can’t both have the throne. Explain to me why you should rule rather than your sister.”

The wise sister stepped forward and said: “Father, I have observed you down the years and I have noticed your lightness of touch with your people and those under your command. I would wish to continue your rule that respects the dignity of each of your subjects and guides with a gentle hand. Most of all, I would like to care for the poor, and hold this sacred office as a duty towards God, held in trust that his law may be seen throughout the land.”

The cruel sister could not help it, she scoffed. “Father, how could you listen to this rubbish. My sister is a soft sentimental fool. You will not have been dead one year, when chaos will rule in our country. Our borders will be invaded, there will be riots in the streets, murderers and thieves will ply their trade unhindered and the land that you love will lie in ruins. My sister, thinks that you are gentle and soft, but I know that it takes strength to rule. I have inherited your strength and I and only I should rule when you are gone!”

The king thought hard and long. He was undecided because he thought he knew his daughters well. He could not decide. At last, he called his daughters to him. “I have decided upon a contest,” he said. “I will give both of you a year to search for a husband throughout the land and the neighboring kingdoms. The one who marries the man who I deem to be the best husband for her, she shall rule my kingdom, when I have gone.”

Both women had different reactions to the proposed contest. The cruel sister gathered her entourage and dressed herself in her finest royal clothes and set out on the year's quest to find a husband.

The good sister did nothing. She stayed home for the first month, content to walk in the gardens and in the fields and woods and pray in the chapel. When she did set out, she dressed herself as a simple peasant girl and took with her the eldest servant as her traveling companion on the road. Over hills and valleys she journeyed, all the time listening and observing. She marveled at the skill of craftsmen; the learning of teachers; and the humility of holy men and women, but most of all she admired the love the farmers gave to the land, their crops and the seasons.

By now, the cruel sister had journeyed far to many countries and kingdoms. She had spent vast sums of money entertaining hansom young princes and dukes. At last she met her perfect match, rich, young, vain and hansom with a cruel streak, just like herself. "I will marry him," she said. And so she began the long journey home to introduce her new husband to her father and win the contest. Half way home she began to agonize, because after all she was a schemer and very devious. "What will that virtuous sister of mine do?" she asked herself. "I bet she chooses some humble, holy, learned scholar."

The wait she found long and boring as the weeks and months dragged by. She wished it was over so that she could marry her prince and rule the kingdom. The people waited too, praying that the wise and virtuous sister would return with a husband to out rival her sister who they feared.

It was Christmas Eve, when the good sister returned, and the entire court assembled in the great hall of the palace. The wicked sister entered dressed in the most magnificent gown, decked with jewels and on her head a crown. By her side was her prince equally dressed. The good sister came in dressed in the rags of the poor, a simple tattered dress, an old cloak with a hood. By her side came her choice for husband. He was dressed even poorer than the good sister with sandals on his feet, a peasant's garb, face and arms tanned brown by the sun. They came before the king and his councilmen and all the nobles and ladies of the land.

The king addressed them: "Well, my daughters at last you have returned and with you stand your husbands. Tell me now, why yours is the better choice."

"Father," said the bad sister, "I have chosen wisely a man of my own class and culture. He has been educated in the finest schools and universities. He knows how to make money, trade and build a kingdom. With sword, lance and bow he is most skilled. He brings with him great wealth and I am pleased to say he will stand by my side when I rule the kingdom."

"We shall see," replied the king. "Now you my daughter what have you brought before us as your choice for husband?"

The good daughter stood before the king and began to speak. Crowds now filled the great hall. They peeped in from every door and window, spilling out into the spaces beyond and filling the great square. Those who could hear and see spreading the word from one to another. "Father, I have journeyed long and far to many lands, countries and places. Over mountains and through forests I have encountered many peoples. Everywhere I went I heard the cries of the poor, saw the ravages of disease, the brutality of war and the inhumanity of man to man. Everywhere I went the people were the same, the poor were poor and the rich lived in fine palaces. I passed among the people of many lands unnoticed, almost like a shadow listening to their stories, learning their ways, feeling their pain. You ask me to choose a husband to rival my sister's, that I may rule this land as you have done. Father, as you come to the end of your reign, the poor are still poor and the rich still live in fine palaces. You do not know your people nor their stories. Others have collected your taxes and the harvest fruit of the labors of your people. Saddest of all, you are not loved, eyes are blank at the mention of your name. I have chosen a good man, not to rule over a kingdom, but to journey with me through life and live among the people of a distant land. There, we will raise your grandchildren, children that you will never see who will know the stories of their people."

Turning to her sneering sister, the good sister said; "Take your kingdom sister for you have chosen best the one who matches you perfectly. You both will rule as your father has done before you. In time, you will make the kingdom even richer, the harvests more plentiful, the castles and palaces finer. Yet, your people will not know you, other than to fear you. The stories of your people will not touch you and your children will grow to be just like you. Take the kingdom for you have won the contest."

The king stood up to speak and the great hall already abuzz after the good daughter's speech, fell silent. "I suppose," said the king, "that this is the time and place where I turn and say how wise you are my daughter and because you have learned these things and sacrificed much, I instead award you the throne. Foolish girl. Did you think me so easily persuaded by such cheap rhetoric? You have squandered your opportunity and with it lost a kingdom."

A fateful gasp went around the hall, rolling into the streets and square far below. The good daughter raised herself to her full height and began to speak. "Lost a kingdom," she said, "you say that I have lost a kingdom. That is like telling the birds that they cannot fly through the air or the bees to settle on a flower. The trees ignore you and grow anyway giving shelter to everyone in the forest man and beast. The rivers flow the waters fall and no word of yours can stop them. Love walks through the stories of your people's lives while you are powerless to capture it. Your people have stories of death and comfort while you can only wait in a fortress till he comes for you. No father, I have not lost a kingdom, I have found a kingdom that you will never see nor experience."

With that the good sister and her chosen man turned and walked slowly back through the hall, the people parting for them cheering wildly with great applause. It rang through the hallways and into the street, where like a distant echo it resounded in the great square. By

the time they reached the palace steps the people had begun to throw flowers, their petals cascading in multi-colored splendor over them. Within minutes their clothes of rags were transformed, as they were bejeweled by the soft charm of nature. Their faces shone, their fingers intertwined, love radiated from their eyes. The people lifted them high on their shoulders and carried them away singing and dancing, through the town, into the fields and over the hills till no one could see them anymore.

As night settled over the land, the people shut their doors, sat around their fires and told themselves the story over and over. The old ones nodded wisely, while the young had sparkle and hope in their eyes, going to bed to dream dreams of a better tomorrow.

The end.

What price freedom? The price of freedom is death. For freedom is to walk without fear tall and straight into every gathering storm with the staff of truth, knowing that the God of truth will see you through. Freedom from wealth, power, freedom from fear, persecution, threat, abuse and evil can only be achieved on the altar of sacrifice. No matter what the source whether it is freedom from sin; freedom from liberal values, freedom from tyranny or freedom from greed and selfishness, the price of freedom is everything.

Everything you own, everything you value, everything you have achieved. Stand back and watch it burn. For the day that you give in to your freedom being taken away, is the day, you have locked yourself in a prison from which you can never escape.

Our fathers knew that when they formed a line of men at Lexington. Our women knew that when they had tubes pushed down their throats in 1918 and were force fed and iron jawed. The men who lay cold and dead on the beaches of Normandy in 1944 knew that too. Gene Robinson knew that when he stepped forward and accepted responsibility to be the pastor of God's people.

There are so many ways that we can imprison ourselves in this life, whether it is to live in an ivory palace or allow ourselves to be seduced by the promise of riches, or blackmailed by an abuse of power, or simply live in fear. Jesus on the cross knew it as he hung bleeding and dying because he would not acquiesce from the truth. He would not abandon the poor. He would not refuse to denounce wrongdoing and evil in his world. He stood as God's Son and said:

“How important is this that one man stand for God's way? How important is truth over the forces of evil?”

The price of freedom is death. Jesus Christ gave his life that freedom might reign in the hearts of men and women.

Today in our parish let us pray for freedom. For freedom is the life blood of God's people. Freedom has been paid for on an altar, on a hill that we call Calvary. Let us all embrace death rather than ever give up our freedom. Death by government, death to sin,

death to a culture of greed and selfishness. Death from losing our amendment rights. Death from losing this great democracy in which we stand. Let them take all we have, even our very lives, but they will never take our freedom.

Amen+